

Summer 2005

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Extension offices in counties throughout the state link the research of the state's land grant university, MSU, with the issues of concern in local communities. Extension provides information and offers educational programs in agriculture and natural resources, youth and families, community and economic development. Local citizens serving on the county Extension council regularly help select current focus areas for programming.

Focus Areas for Extension Programming in

Building Healthy Families	Helping Youth Succeed
Building Healthy Communities	Healthy Economic Development
Healthy Environment	

Volunteer project enhances, protects and educates about spillway

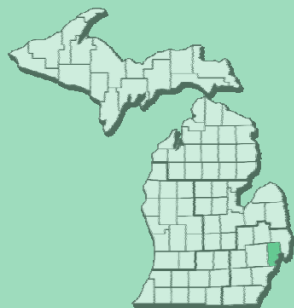
In 1998, with support from Macomb County Public Works, the Charter Township of Clinton, community service workers, senior groups and local citizens, MSU Extension (MSUE) Master Gardener volunteers founded the Clinton River Spillway Bike Path Project. A neighboring middle school and a former 4-H Club designed and planted the Eastpointe Children's Garden Project, as well as a vegetable garden—planted for the hungry. Master Gardeners use the site for teaching purposes and oversee its maintenance.

Project goals are to:

- Beautify, enhance and protect land and water quality around the spillway,
- Provide educational and volunteer opportunities,
- Create a functional and attractive pathway for wildlife and the community,
- Raise environmental awareness and promote environmental responsibility and
- Protect valuable green-space.

This once-empty strip of property which lines a major road and spillway in Southern Macomb County is now adorned with more than 120 trees and nine gardens, planted and tended to by volunteers.

Recently, this collaborative community beautification effort led by Master Gardeners received national recognition for transforming a barren cement walkway into a learning lab for gardeners—described by a local nun as “an urban piece of heaven.” The Scotts Company and Fiskars Garden Tools Company both awarded the project for accomplishing its goals with funding for further bike path development. Furthermore, the Eastpointe Children's Garden Project was the only garden in Michigan to be



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recognized by Fiskars. Keep Michigan Beautiful, Inc., a non-profit, educational organization that encourages statewide community beautification efforts, recently acknowledged the contributions of all Bike Path Project volunteers as well.

More information about the project visit: www.macombcountymi.gov/msuextension/MGbikepathproject.asp. *Contact: Sandra Richards*

Education, opportunity for change aim to restore community

Sounds of hammers and shouts of camaraderie have replaced police sirens in Colchester, a neighborhood in Clinton Township, long beset with drug activity and illegal dumping.

Recently, eleven homes have been built and five more are planned for next year. These new homes and new families who are prepared for home ownership are transforming the community.

Macomb MSUE is involved in a collective effort with the township, Road Commission, County and District Court, other non-profit organizations and residents to:

- Build houses,
- Donate lots,
- Educate home owners,
- Enforce blight ordinances,
- Improve drainage,
- Pave streets and
- Utilize grant money wisely.

Specifically, MSUE offers resources for positive change by providing housing counseling and money management training to prospective homebuyers who hope to purchase a home through Housing Opportunities for Macomb (HoM) and Habitat for Humanity. In addition, MSUE staff serves on the Board of Directors for HoM. This involvement is a combination of practical education and community development – work that transforms individual lives as well as neighborhoods.

A decision to focus on a troubled area in Macomb County, rather than to write it off to decay, has been

a catalyst for change for the community. Residents are purchasing homes, trusting that the community will continue its upward spiral. Volunteers continue to donate their time and money to make the dream of homeownership a reality for others. *Contact: Anne Lilla*

Parents of teens learn new techniques to form stronger family bonds

Building Strong Adolescents (BSA), a parenting program for families with teenagers, was offered in March 2005. Extension Educators Su Porter (Macomb County) and Kim Mihelich (St. Clair County) team-taught the four-session class in New Baltimore, a city bordering both counties. Twenty-four people (18 Macomb/6 St. Clair) attended.

The purpose of the class is to not only help youth succeed, but to help build healthier families and, in turn, healthier communities. Sessions focused on communication skills, developing positive life skills, setting boundaries and consequences, fostering independence and encouraging positive friendships. In a three-month follow up survey of randomly selected participating parents:

- 91 percent indicated they frequently have in-depth conversations with their teenager. Prior, only 33 percent did so.
- 73 percent felt their teen now cares more about others' feelings. Prior, 56 percent felt their teen sometimes or never showed empathy.

After completing the class, many parents commented that they had learned to be a better listener and how to share information without lecturing. Most participants were not aware of adolescent brain development; that an adolescent's brain is still developing—particularly the cerebral cortex, which recognizes consequences. Parents learned that teens need to be taught how to recognize consequences of actions, similar to other life skills.

BSA was designed in response to a 2004 MSUE parental needs assessment. The class will be offered again—in conjunction with St. Clair MSUE—in November 2005. As a result of the final evaluations the next class will be six sessions and allow for more parent-to-parent interaction. *Contact: Su Porter*

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